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Description of

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"THE RUBAIYAT" of Omar Khayyam. ✓

It was in the early years of the eleventh century that three Persian schoolboys entered into what was known to them as a blood pact. Each of the boys swore that the first to obtain riches would assist his two less fortunate schoolmates. The boys were Hasan Ben Sabbah; Nizam-ul-Mulk; and Omar Khayyam.

Twenty years later one of the schoolboys was Grand Vizier of the Sultan of Persia. This boy was Nizam-ul-Mulk. To him came Omar Khayyam upon whom fortune had not smiled, asking for the means wherewith to devote his life to astronomy. The records of that period show that Omar obtained a yearly pension and that he won fame in astronomy, mathematics; poetry and other intellectual subjects.

Hasan Ben Sabbah sought wealth and dominions and obtained them, and became powerful in Persia.

As the years sped by Omar, the old poet and philosopher settled down in Naishapur, his birthplace, and from there published his verses, and lived the life of a pleasure seeking sage, beloved by many friends, among whom there was a prosperous Sheik, Rustan, the chief of a great tribe.

Rustan had a beautiful daughter, Shirin (a "spray of almond blossoms") beloved by the handsome young Ali, the son of a Bedouin chieftain. Sheik Rustan looked with favor upon the suit of Ali for the hand of his daughter, but the young lover was shy and timid, and although he and the girl exchanged pretty sentiments an open avowal

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of their mutual passion had not yet been reached.

Crime and intrigue meanwhile had dogged the career of Hasan Ben Sabbah who in his ambitions to become master of Persia founded a secret order of Assassins which spread terror throughout the Mohammedan world. Still, although resorting to the use of Hashish, a drug, to control his bands of Assassins, Ben Sabbah forbade the use of wine.

But the juice of the grape was the means of sowing unhappiness in Ben Sabbah's family. Slave girls and ruby wine tempted Malik, his son, in his father's absence, and to the dismay of his mother, Hadija, Hasan's chief wife. The mother warned her son that his father hated wine and forbade its use. But the boy disregarded his mother's admonitions, and even went the length of urging his terrible father to drink wine. So angry was Hasan Ben Sabbah at his son's disobedience that he struck him dead, to the unspeakable grief of his mother, who vowed to have vengeance on her brutal husband.

The people of Naishapur became incensed against the assassins, whose atrocities among the peaceful inhabitants excited general horror. Still, the butcheries went on, until Omar moved by the plight of his townsmen resolved to appeal to his old schoolmate of the blood pact, the Grand Vizier, Nizam-ul-Mulk.

The Grand Vizier listened to Omar and arraigned Hasan before him. But the chief of the Assassins denied his crimes, and found means of killing more of his enemies, until concealment of his villainy being no longer possible, he was banished from Persia.

Meanwhile, with the apparent banishment of Hasan, comparative peace settled over Naishapur, where old Omar was always the center of

a circle of congenial spirits. The beauty of Shirin, Sheik Rustan's daughter, became more than ever renowned throughout Persia. The fame of it even reached the ears of the wily Hasan Ben Sabbah who disregarded the edict of banishment pronounced against him. He was too powerful and could not be excluded from Persia by force.

Hasan coveted Shirin for his harem and returning in disguise to Naishapur corrupted Sheik Rustan's body steward with gifts and flattery. The disguise which Hasan assumed was that of his own eunuch. For a bag of the Eunuch's gold, the steward bargained to spy on Shirin and Sheik Rustan just at the time when Ali had summoned up courage to ask Sheik Rustan for the hand of his daughter.

But now was Hasan Ben Sabbah's time to strike for possession of the beautiful girl. The eunuch (Hasan in disguise) presented to Sheik Rustan a letter stating that to cement the bond and secure the allegiance of Rustan's tribe Allah had favored Hasan Ben Sabbah with a sight of his daughter and he demanded her for his harem.

Sheik Rustan received this direful news with dismay for he loved his daughter dearly. The Eunuch (Hasan in disguise) sought out Shirin to plead his own case but was brusquely repulsed by the girl who declared that not for all the wealth of Persia would she wed a man like his master.

"Perhaps", said the disguised Hasan, "you would rather see your father's tents burned to the ground, or your little brother sold into slavery, your father tortured before your eyes; your people impaled aloft for buzzards to devour?"

The horror stricken girl, crushed, hopeless, recoiled from

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the contemplation of these terrors; and her father in despair pleaded for the safety and honor of his beloved child. Fearful of the threats of Hasan's eunuchs, Sheik Rustan sent a mysterious stranger who had come to Naishapur, to Omar for advice and help. Before the Eunuch could return for his answer, Rustan calculated that Omar would arrive with his warriors and save his beloved child and his tribe from extinction.

Omar himself confronted the Eunuch and bade him begone. Enraged by the mockery of Rustan's friends Hasan decided to strike against them, so gathering his assassins he prepared to descend upon Naishapur. The opposing forces met, the Assassins being led by the supposed eunuch. Rustan's steward repenting of his perfidy returned the gold to the eunuch, declaring that he was no party to the crime.

At the height of the battle between the Assassins and the people of Naishapur, the mysterious stranger appeared and unmasked the Eunuch, declaring:

"This is no Eunuch; Behold Ben Sabbah, old man of the mountains, Hasan the Assassin."

Hasan and the stranger fought to the death.

"Ye slew my son. This is the hour of my vengeance, I avenge my boy, my Malik. Thou has forfeited the mercy shown at thy banishment, Vengeance is upon thee, Hasan Ben Sabbah."

And as Hasan died from the sword thrust of the mysterious stranger he learned that the latter was his own chief wife, Hadija, who thus killed her husband for murdering his own son.

Sheik Rustan's daughter and tribe were saved, and the beautiful Shirin was bestowed upon Ali. The last days of Omar were passed in peace. ("A book of verses underneath the Bough -- oh, wilderness were Paradise enow.")

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